US families affected by unemployment up by 33 percent

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The number of US households with at least one unemployed parent has swelled as a result of the economic crisis, rising 33 percent between 2005 and 2011, according to a report published Tuesday by the Census Bureau.

The report, entitled *America's Families and Living Arrangements: 2012*, found that the number of households with children under 18 where at least one parent was unemployed rose from 2.4 million to 3.2 million. In some states, the increase was much higher. Nevada had a 148 percent increase in families affected by unemployment, Hawaii had a 95 percent increase, and California had a 61 percent increase.

"During the recession, economic well-being worsened for families with children," said Jamie Lewis, one of the report's co-authors. "Home ownership among families declined, while food stamp receipt and parental unemployment increased. Even after the recession officially ended in 2009, these measures remained worse than before it began."

The report found a vast increase in many forms of social distress and a decline in signs of economic well-being. The number of households with children under 18 that owned their own homes fell by 15 percent, to 20.8 million, between 2005 and 2011.

There was also a significant increase in the number of young people living with their parents, resulting from a fall in incomes and reduced job prospects. The percent of men aged 25 to 34 living in their parents' homes increased from 13 percent in the early 2000s to 17 percent in 2012. For women in this age group, the percent living with their parents increased from 8 percent to 10 percent.

The report noted that "these trends in young adult living arrangements follow a broader pattern in the United States in which young adults are experiencing the traditional markers of adulthood, such as starting a family, leaving their parents' home, and establishing stable careers, later in life than previous recent generations did."

The report, which is based on the Census Bureau's American Community Survey and Current Population Survey, outlined the demographic shifts stemming from the 2008 Wall Street crash. It noted a significant deterioration in the economic well-being of all types of family groups, stating, "Although married families tend to be economically better off than other families, the economic well-being of all family types worsened on average during the 2007–2009 recession and in the years since its official end."

Children of married parents are also increasingly vulnerable, according to the Census Bureau. Food stamp usage by children of married parents nearly tripled—from 4 percent to 11 percent—since 2002.

The report further noted, "The percentage of mother-only and father-only family groups increased since 2007." It added that almost half of children who lived with their mother only, with two unmarried parents, or with no parents were living below the poverty line.

While the 2008 financial crisis led to a sharp increase in social distress, the so-called "recovery" that followed saw continued mass unemployment, rising poverty and falling wages. This was underscored by a study released August 21 by the Economic Policy Institute, which showed that real hourly wages fell dramatically during the economic "recovery" of 2007-2012. According to the report, based on figures from the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey, real average hourly wages fell by 2.8 percent for people with a high school degree, 4.7 percent for high school graduates, and 5.6 percent for high school graduates who partially completed a college degree.

The dismal economic conditions confronting the majority of the population are driving significant shifts in demographics and family life. Non-college graduates in the US have become “less likely to get married, stay married, and have their children within marriage than those with college degrees,” according to a recent study by the University of Virginia and Harvard University.

“Working class people with insecure work and few resources, little stability, and no ability to plan for a foreseeable future become concerned with their own survival and often become unable to imagine being able to provide materially and emotionally for others,” said Sarah Corse, an associate professor of sociology at the University of Virginia. Corse is the lead author of *Intimate Inequalities: Love and Work in a Post-Industrial Landscape*. She concluded, “Marriage is becoming a distinctive social institution marking middle-class status.”

In July, the Associated Press reported, based on soon-to-be published data, that four in five Americans are “economically insecure,” struggling with near-poverty or unemployment, or relying on government programs for at least a year of their lives. The report added that, based on the current growth rate of poverty, 85 percent of all working-age adults will experience economic insecurity at some point in their lives by 2030.

This followed a June report by the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis showing that, after adjusting for inflation, the average US household had recovered only 45 percent of the wealth it lost after the 2008 crash.